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SUBJECT: CACOPHONY IN FRANCE'S FOREIGN TELEVISION POLICY

REF: Paris 1856

1. (SBU) France's foreign television policy, which plays a major role in the dissemination of French language and culture throughout the world, is going through a rocky patch. After the shaky start of France's proposed international all-news television station CII (REFTEL), to broadcast mostly in English, it is now the turn of the GOF's preferred instrument for French-language television policy, TV5, to be in a quandary, following the recent resignation of its president and former Culture minister Jean-Jacques Aillagon. According to Aillagon, his resignation is designed to highlight the GOF's decision to treat France's international all-news network as the priority, at the expense of TV5, France's main foreign television instrument.

2. (SBU) The GOF currently injects some 314 million euros into its foreign television and radio networks annually. A little under a third of that amount goes to TV5, hardly enough to meet its ambitious goal of broadcasting to 120 million French-speaking viewers around the world. Despite its presence in 6,000 cable networks across the globe and its subsidiaries on all five continents, French observers concur with Aillagon that TV5 needs more funds to retain its French-language audience. Furthermore, they claim that TV5 already has a news program capable of offering a genuine international vision in French. Established in 1984, TV5 emerged as a result of cooperation of French public-sector channels with its Swiss, Belgian and French-Canadian counterparts.

3. (SBU) This latest episode reflects the GOF's persistent efforts over the past eight years to refocus France's foreign television strategy, in order to both spread "the good word in French" while increasing France's television exports, currently the world's fifth largest after the United States, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom. So far, however, confusion has prevailed. TV5 has a new chairman (Francois Bonnemain, former Prime Minister Raffarin's Chief-of-Staff), but its budget continues to be controlled by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while that of the proposed international all-news network, CII, will be administered by the Prime Minister's office. To be continued, undoubtedly.  
Stapleton